



CHRISTIAN HOPE

BY · RALPH · CONNOR

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THE SILENT HOUR BOOKLETS



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CHRISTIAN HOPE



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CHRISTIAN HOPE † † BY RALPH CONNOR



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Christian Hope

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."—HEB. vi. 19-20.

HET us think what Christian hope is, and differentiate it from the hope that is not Christian. Speaking generally, it is difficult to define hope, just as it is difficult to lay your hand upon its origin. Hope may be defined as the expectation of the thing desired. Hope is the expectation of the thing you long for. It differs from faith in this way—faith enables you to see while it is still distant; hope brings it over the intervening distances and enables you to enter now into possession of the thing you long for. Hope takes things that faith reveals to us and

Faith and
Hope

Christian Hope

Hope
key

to
faith

gives them to us to enjoy to-day in a certain measure. You will see that the two elements in hope are the element of desire with all the attendant feeling of unrest, all the attendant sense of uneasiness, of discord, of weariness,—and along with that desire, you have the element of sureness, the element of faith. It is faith kindled into light, faith that works in the dark taking fire one day and flaming up, showing us the thing we have not seen before. Faith, as receiving, is hope,—faith with desire, lifting our hearts on over all spaces to the place where we would be. Now the difference between Christian hope and other hope will appear as we go on. Other hope that is not Christian

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sometimes fails because it is realized only too well. But Christian hope has only this failure, that it never realizes well enough. How many men here who have come to years of manhood, have had to pass through this painful, this bitter experience that the things they have hoped for, struggled for, when they got them they realized them only too much, only too well? They were disappointed, and the fulness of realization was just the measure of their disappointment. There are Christians here, though, in this country who have lived by the hope that is a sure-founded Christian hope. Not one of them would rise and tell you this, "My hope has failed because it could not satisfy."

*The fulness
of realization*

Christian Hope

Hope the
the

The only failure they have in their hope is this, the light was not clear enough to reveal all that was precious, that they have realized far more than even the greatest and brightest light of hope ever promised them. Now it is important that we should be quite sure of our hope, for we live by hope. The Apostle puts it this way, he says "We are saved by hope," and in this letter to the Hebrews we have this remarkable achievement ascribed to hope. "Hope," he says, "is the anchor of the soul." Hope is the anchor carried within the harbour and dropped into the still water. Now in this figure of speech you will at once see that the Apostle means that hope does for a man

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these two things, first holds him steady, keeps him from drifting, holds his head in the right direction so that whatever currents may blow against him, his head will be held steady toward the harbour—the holding power of hope. Now, those of us who have had a very little experience of life believe it true, that one of the most subtle dangers that can come upon us is this, that before we know, we have changed the direction to which we are pointing, and have to beat back against the current or against wind. How do men change their attitude towards holy things? You have not, perhaps, the same attitude towards God and religion as you had ten years ago. Tell me how you have

A subtle
danger

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changed your attitude? I am speaking to a man now who finds himself insensibly changed, who finds his life pointing not straight at God, but somewhat obliquely off from God. Tell me how you came to change your heading? Not one man in this company who has had this sad experience, will honestly tell me that he changed his direction of life after he had sat down and considered all the facts, had carefully gone over all the data, and then made up his mind definitely that he was heading wrong and changed the course of his life from this way to that. Not one. The change has come and you never knew it. It was a process of drifting, the effect of the public

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opinion in which you lived. How impossible for a business man to maintain his ideals in the face of business customs that are round about him, unless he has some steadying hope outside of himself, that grips him and holds him and refuses to let him drift. I am thinking of a young man, who, about ten years ago, came to me very anxious about a certain business, didn't know whether he should go into it or not. He went in. Where is he to-day? Not here. Why did he change? Did he make up his mind that he might safely pursue this line? Not he. All the time he thought he was pointing for the right straight course, he drifted until he was around the headland.

An example
of drifting

Christian Hope

THE GREAT
QUEST

About the most dangerous thing we have to fear is the process of drifting and changing without the settled resolution of our minds. Now hope is what we want: active, bright, buoyant, well-assured hope keeps us steady against the process of drifting. How is that? It is easy to explain. Hope, I have said, is the thing that brings the future near to us. Hope is the thing that allows us to enter into present possession of our desire. Now if the soul is feeding upon its desire, and that desire is for the highest and best, what happens with that which is feeding upon such a desire? The heart grows toward that desire. The man who has his heart set upon God and is determined to live for

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God, come what may, that man has realized a little more of God and God's ways and what God does for a man. Why, his heart expands, and he becomes more able to take in God, and it is impossible for any current to shake him away from God. This is one little reason why hope holds.

A lifting-on
power

The other thing hope is said to do here, or is suggested by the figure, is this, it has a lifting-on power. Now all sailors know this is what happens, — sometimes, in a very difficult place, in working against the wind, round a headland, it is found necessary to run the anchor out and drop it, and then work on the cable, swing round a difficult point, and come round to a

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place of safety. I remember once, in the far north, in Ontario, seeing this beautifully illustrated in a lumber raft. The wind had died down, and there was no possibility of moving the big raft except by the cable, and so the anchor was taken away out in a little boat and dropped in the lake, and then the raft was pulled up to the anchor.

This is exactly the way in which we avail ourselves of hope; the soul being drawn on toward it, lifted over, lifted through all sorts of storms, waves, and all sorts of difficult passages, until, sure enough, the harbour we have been making for is ours, and we are safe. Now, hope acts like that upon the soul. This is the way John puts

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it. He says, "Every man that hath this hope in Christ purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Every man who has got his heart set upon Jesus Christ, with the expectation of one day arriving at Him, and seeing Him, and coming face to face with Him, and entering into close communion with Him,—every man knowing this hope feels the pull of it on his life. He must be pure, he must keep himself pure, and noble, and strong, and kind, and brave, if he is ever going to look his Saviour in the face. It is when you expect most of that meeting that you are strongest against all the besetting sins of life; and it is when your hope has died down and Christ has become unreal to

The power
of hope

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you, that all your old temptations rush upon you, and you know you are done. I have said enough to show, I think, that hope is a great thing in the soul, how it holds a man to his wisely and carefully-thought-out course, and how it lifts a man over all his present experiences of adverse circumstances. The history of the nations of the world and all the great achievements of humankind is simply a story of the world's hope. The history of any nation is just the story of its hope, how some man cherished a hope for better things for his country, how it grew upon him, how it possessed him, until he became mad with expectation, how he went from heart to heart until the

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expectation could not be denied, and the whole nation was lifted up to its better position. Read in history of any people, and you will find the story of some great hope in the heart of a man. Who is this that is coming across the ocean with his three little boats? Who is this that comes over the billows and drags with him his unwilling followers, until one day his hope is realized when the land appears and a continent is discovered? And so with every nation and every achievement, every great fight for freedom is at the beginning but some man with hope in his heart.

Scotsmen have their hearts thrilled with tales of Bruce, how again and again he was drawn on to great

Christian Hope

deeds by a great hope that Scotland should be free, clinging to his hope and refusing to let it go. It would not let him go neither until it lifted his whole army with him, and the nation with him to its freedom. Abraham is called the Father of the Faithful, because in him hope and faith were one. The hope came to him that God would give him a great nation and a great country, and on that hope it was that he left the country he had and went north-west. Take the great achievement of art: how many canvases have been spoiled to produce the great picture of a century? How many great statues have been broken to give us the sculptor's masterpiece? Nobody

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knows the countless hours of toil, and disappointment, and long patient struggle. Why? Because, as Michael Angelo said, "I see the angel in this block of marble; I am not content until I set him free." It is true in our personal experience. How many of us to-day who have succeeded, and how many of you, who have been successful in your profession, would have stood where you are to-day if you had yielded to that moment of despair which was the result of failure not once, but failure almost every day. But out of the ruins of our achievements and our attempts, there arises this thing that beckons us on, and says, "Come on and follow me, you shall at last reach me." And so you

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are to-day what you are, because you have listened to the voice of hope, and you are here with what it promised you. Now, whether hope is true or false, substantial or unsubstantial, is no difference; the lifting power of hope is always the same.


We are talking about Christian hope. We are talking about the hope that came to us when we closed with Christ in His great suggestion. We are talking about the hope that grows up in our hearts the day we adventure the great experiment with Christ. How did it come to us? It came to every one of us; first there was the desire. We were not content; that desire is in some cases very poignant, in

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some not so poignant. Where that desire rose up out of a mighty experience of failure, or of loss, or of sin, or shame, where the heart was hot with desire for release of these things, for the deliverance from things that were holding us down; we had the great impulse for the things that would rescue and upraise us. The fact that a man is discontented with the thing that he is, is a kind of promise that he will not always be the thing that he now is. It is because there burns in the heart of man, as man, this intense longing for freedom, that it has been difficult to hold people in slavery; because in the blackest and most degraded of Africa's sons in the United States,

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not so many years ago, even in them, just because they were men, there burned this fire for freedom; because of that it was that the cry arose continually louder, and it caught the ear of the whole nation, and freedom became possible, rising up out of desire. Passing through Cleveland I came upon a thing that gave me a great shock of surprise. They have a great war monument there. I passed through it, and looked round the various sides, came out to this farther side and turned round and looked back. I saw the figure of the great Lincoln striking at the fetters of a poor slave who held his hands up to him. Magnificently done, it just threw upon my heart with terrific



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force the whole weight of that struggle of the black man, and how the heart of Lincoln could not be turned aside, and he risked his very nation for the fulfilment of that hope. The black man was groping upwards with the kind of sense that he was meant for better things, that God did not mean him to be a slave, that God did not mean him to lie down under the tyranny of custom and circumstance. It was the angel in him struggling for escape from the dead grip of the marble. Now, looking back upon your bygone period of suffering, upon that which was some great and terrible reality in your experience, you can see how your hope began to climb? What else? There

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Under
optimism

was this, the responsibility that came from their troubles, the responsibility that came from God, that came from Christ. Unless that was there, you have no hope tonight that you have a right to call hope. There is a way of talking about hope that is very misleading. There is a kind of optimism that is worse than despair. If a man is in the grip of a deadly disease, I think it is a cruel kindness, and a mistaken kindness which sometimes foolish physicians in attendance insist upon administering to the dying, to refuse to face or help him to face the fact. It is cruel folly for a man who is in the grip of death to be told that all is well. There is a kind of disease of which

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the strongest symptom is optimism,—and that optimism makes it fatal. It is a cruel thing to tell a nation it is doing well when it is going into financial ruin. The great example of modern history is the example of France. Under the ambition and vanity of the Empress, the French nation were persuaded that they were ready for war. Nothing could stop France. All the glory of the past came beating into their hearts and minds until they believed themselves to be invincible and irresistible, until the cry was "On to Berlin," and the vision was a treaty signed in Berlin. How vainly and wickedly foolish that slip! There were no facts at the basis of it, nothing to build upon.

France and
the war of
1870

Christian Hope

"Come unto
Me"

I say the fact of our need is firmly established out of that belief, desire, the desire of our hope. It was in the Christ from outside of us, who came to meet our desire with His proposition, and His proposition is the old proposition made to Abraham. "Come out from where you are. I will be more to you than all else." Christ said, "Come unto Me, I will give you Eternal Life. My sheep follow Me; they hear My voice." People think it will all be well with them in the future. Nothing surely will be wrong. This is a very good world, a good world and growing better, but not growing better by the folly of vain hopes. Everything is going well, and everything is getting

Christian Hope

better. A man said to me, "Every-
thing is going well," and in his
business there was reeking sin, and
he refused to see it, he was content
to cherish this foolish optimism. I
say the Christian hope which will
not disappoint is the hope that
takes knowledge of these two facts,
that you need the thing you desire,
and that God will give it to you
if you follow Him. God will meet
you if you risk your life on Him.
God will realise for you your best
and highest if you give Him a
chance. So Luther brought us into
our present religious liberty, so
Cromwell into our present civil free-
dom, so all the great leaders of the
race have brought us to the high
places we occupy because they list-

Christian Hope

ened to the need in their hearts and promise of God outside their hearts, and these two burned together to a great living immortal hope.

The last enemy is death. Death is a stubborn fact. Life tries to persuade us that there is no death. It is an insult to the living to suggest death. Life repudiates it and puts it out of mind. It will arrive. It is coming down the street; it will knock at our door, be the door humble or great. What has the Christian hope to say about death? First, what has all other hope to say? I tell you that when all other hope comes face to face with this thing we call death, it is plunged into gloom and despondency. What about our hope

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when we come near the shades of this great deepening cloud? What happens? We feel a pull from the other side. I become conscious that this is an empty thing, simply a shade that crosses our heart. The realities are beyond. He has arrived, and we feel the pull of His immortality upon our spirits, for we believe that if Jesus Christ died and rose again, with Him also God will bring us. So when death comes, we push it aside. We make our passage through with comfort, held and drawn by our great hope. When death arrives at our home, knocks at our door and tries to throw his excluding shade over the faces of those we love, we resent his impertinence, and say to him,

There is
no
darkness

Christian Hope

The real
fact of the
matter

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" We are not losing our true life or anything else worth having, we are about to gain everything, because of our immortal hope in Jesus Christ; this is the real fact of the matter; and when you realise it to the full, you will be surprised at how little of the truth it gives you, and how much more than we can deserve or desire is waiting to be unfolded for us, as a flower expands from out of its close-shut bud. Therefore let us live up to our hope that bids us be great and promises us we shall be great, that bids us be pure, and promises we shall be like Him when we see Him as He is. That hope which will not

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let us be content in trying to satisfy The sons
of God
ourselves with the things that pass,
for we are the sons of God and
heirs of His glory.

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